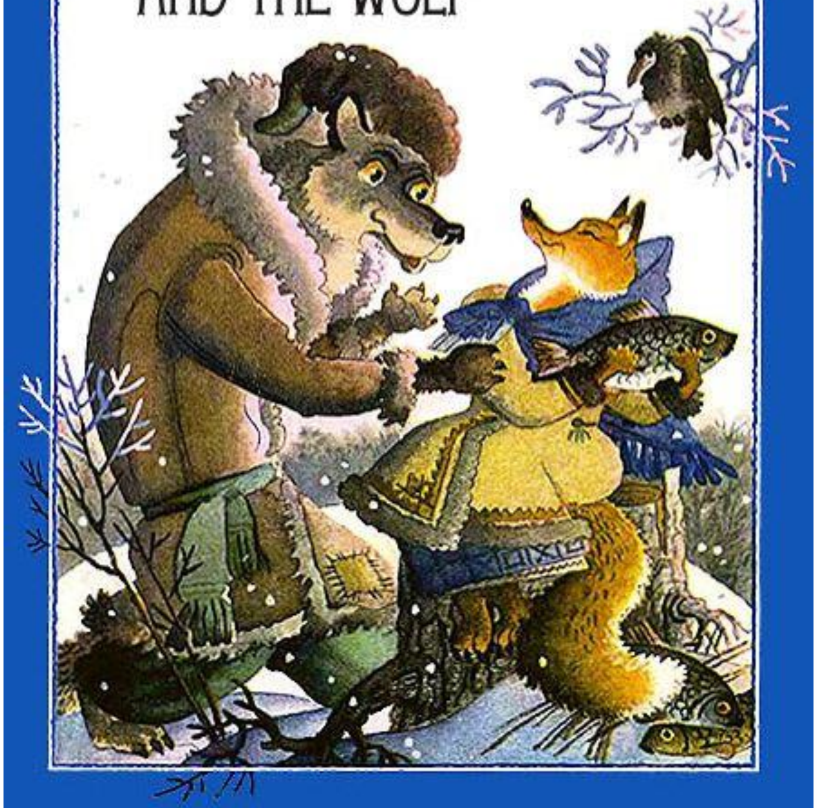
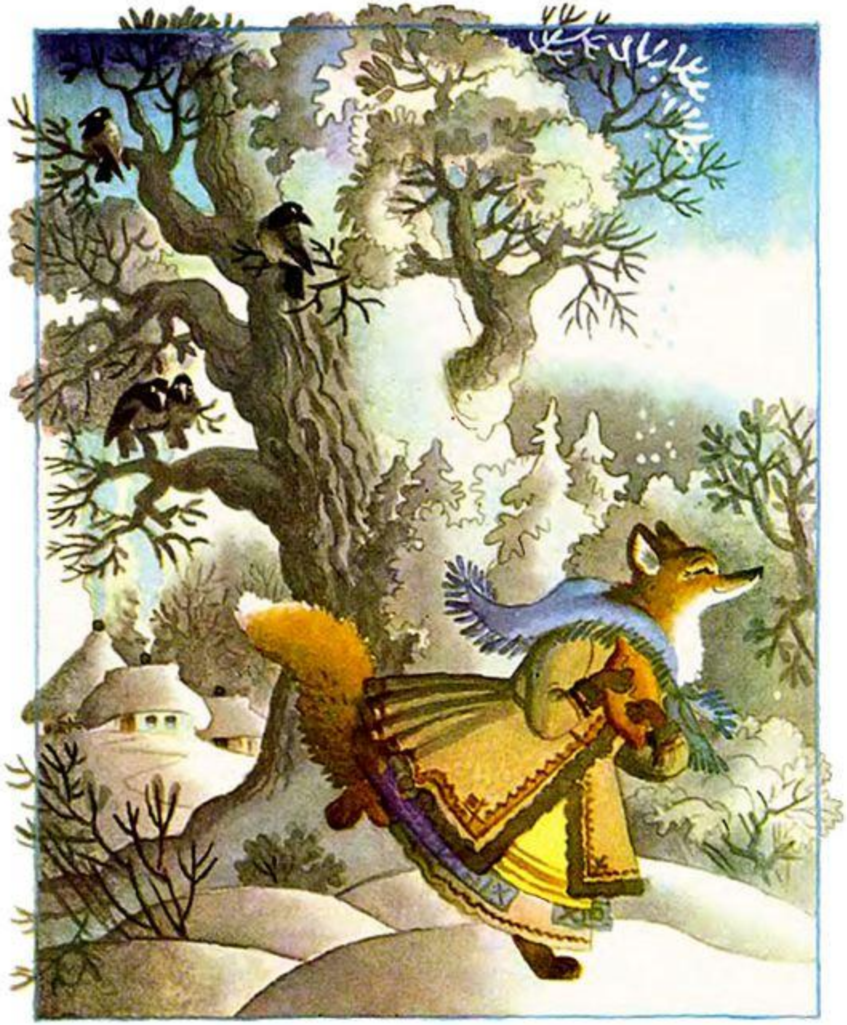
UKRAINIAN FOLK TALE

THE FOX AND THE WOLF

Translated by

Illustrated by V. Kavun





Once upon a time there was an Old Man and an Old Woman. One Sunday the Old Woman baked poppy-seed rolls. When they were done, she took them out of the oven and put them in a bowl on the windowsill to cool. Presently a vixen came running past the house, and sniffed - what lovely rolls! She sneaked up to the window, snatched one of the rolls and scampered off. Then she ran into a field, sat down, picked all the poppy seeds out of the roll, stuffed it with chaff, pressed the two halves of the roll together, and hurried off.

On her way she came across some cowherds driving cattle.

"Hullo, boys!"

"Hullo, Foxy-Loxy!"

"Give me a bully-calf for a poppy-seed roll!"

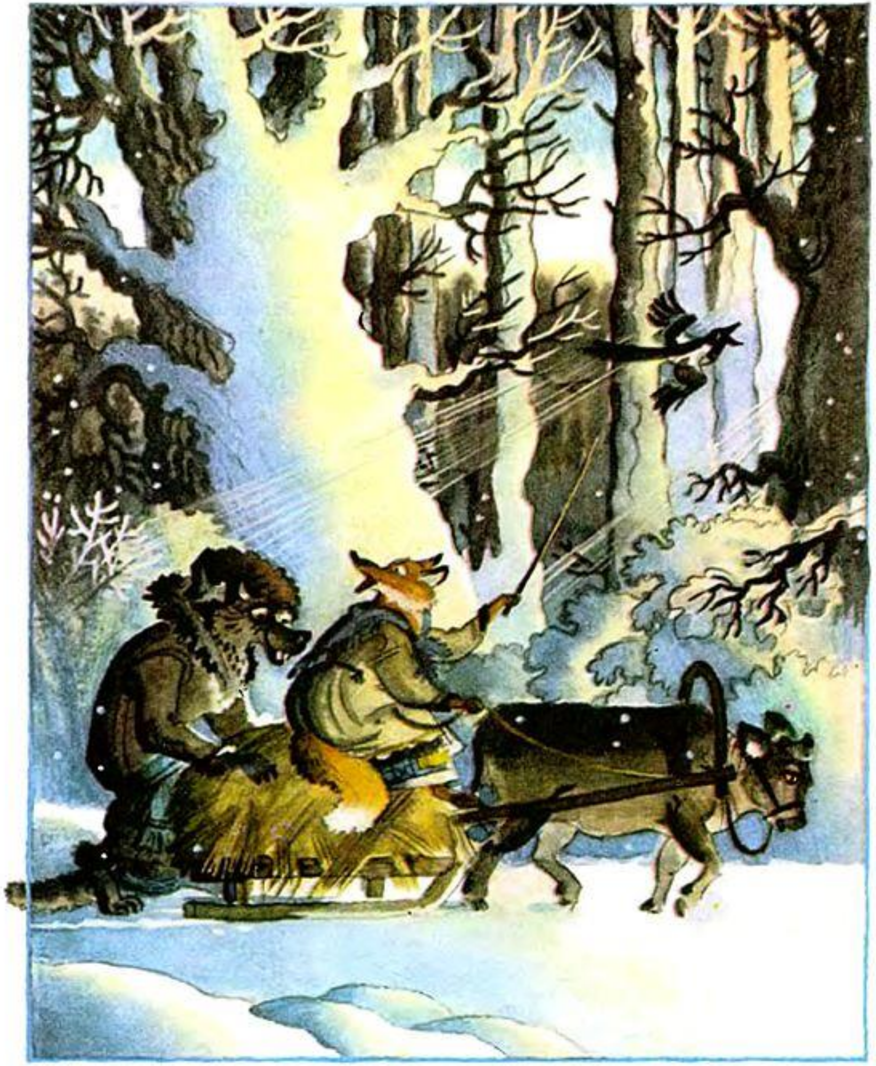
"What, a bully-calf for a poppy-seed roll? What's the idea!"

"Oh, but it's so sweet, you'll simply love it!"

She wheedled and she coaxed till one of the boys went and gave her the bully-calf.

"Now listen, boys," she said, "see you don't start eating the roll before I reach the woods!"

And off she ran, driving the bully-calf ahead. The boys waited till she disappeared in the woods, then took to eating the roll. But oh! it was all chaff inside...



Meanwhile, the vixen drove the bully-calf into the woods, tied him to an oak tree, and went to fell some trees to make herself a sledge. She went about her work, repeating all the while:

"Fall down, trees - crooked and straight! Fall down, trees - crooked and straight!"

Then she made herself a sledge, hitched up the bully-calf and drove off. Presently the wolf came running her way.

"Hullo, Foxy-Loxy!"

"Hullo, Palsy-Wolfie!"

"Where'd you get the bully-calf and the sledge?"

"Oh, I earned the bully-calf and I made the sledge myself!"

"Well, give me a lift then!"

"How can I? Why, you'd break my sledge!"

"No, I won't. I'll put only one paw on it."

"All right, go ahead."

So the wolf put one paw on the sledge and they drove on.

After a while the wolf said:

"You know what, Foxy-Loxy, I'll put another paw on the sledge."

"But, Palsy-Wolfie, you'll break it!"

"No, I won't!"

"All right, go ahead!"

The wolf put a second paw on the sledge and they drove on and on, when all of a sudden - creak!

"Ah me!" cried the vixen. "The sledge is breaking!"

"Oh no, Foxy-Loxy, that's only my bones creaking."They continued on their way, and again the wolf said:

"You know what, Foxy-Loxy, I'll put my third paw on the sledge."

"But where can you put it! You'll break my sledge completely!"

"Oh no, why should I break it?"

"All right!"

No sooner did he put the third paw on the sledge, than - creak! creak!

"Hey, wolfie, the sledge is creaking. Get off or you'll break it!"

"Are you making up things, Foxy-Loxy? That was a nut I just cracked."

"Was it? Give me one, then!" "It was the last one I had." After some while the wolf said: "You know what, Foxy-Loxy, I'll sit down on the sledge!"

"You'll what!? But there's no room!" "Don't you worry, I'll double up somehow!" "You'll break my sledge completely! Then what will I bring my firewood home in?"

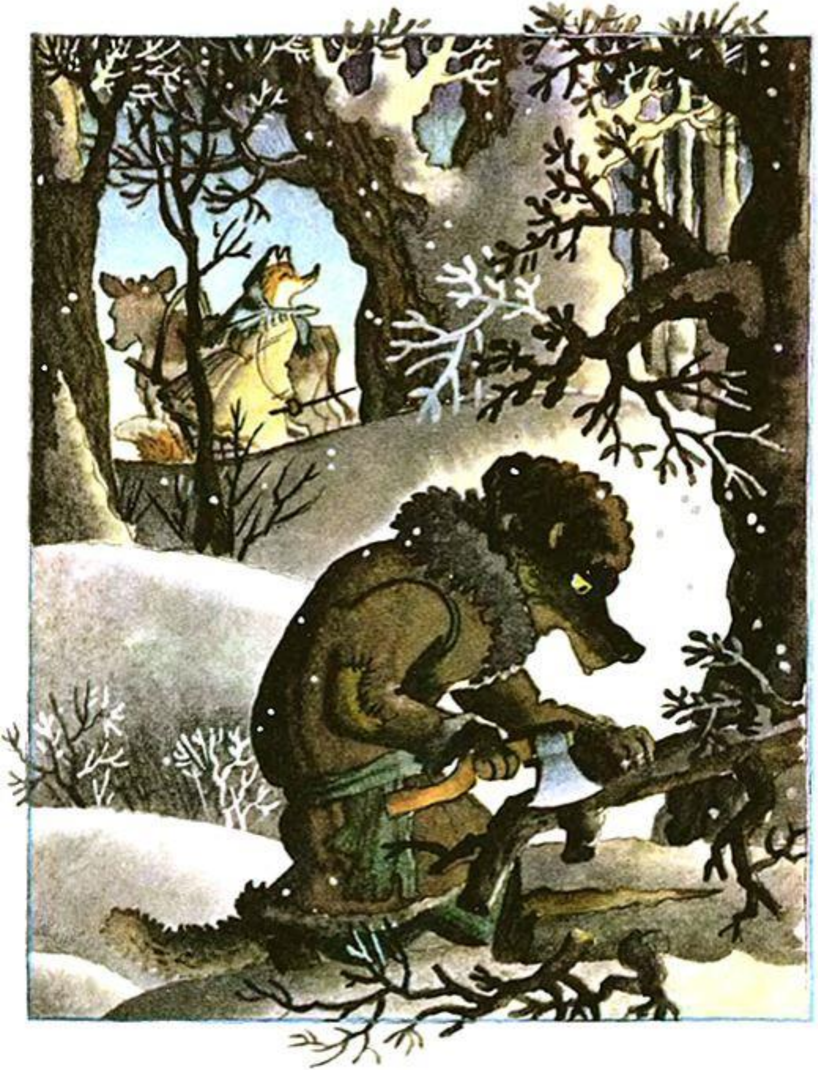
"Now, now, why should I break it? I'm not that heavy. I simply must sit down, Foxy-Loxy, for I'm so tired. I'll be careful, really."

"All right, go ahead. Guess I have no choice."

He climbed onto the sledge, and no sooner had he done so, when - crack! bang! crash! - the sledge broke to pieces.

What a hullabaloo the vixen raised!

"Oh, you vile cheat, you tramp of a wolf! Look what you've done!"



She fumed and she raved, and finally said:

"Now go and chop down some trees for a sledge."

"But how can I, Foxy-Loxy, when I don't know how or even what kind of trees?"

"Oh, you wretched dope! So you know how to break a sledge, but you don't know how to fell a tree, is that it? All you have to say is 'Fall down, trees - crooked and straight! Fall down, trees - crooked and straight! Fall down, trees - crooked and straight!' Understand?"

So the wolf went off into the woods and set to work, repeating all the while:

"Fall down, trees - crooked and crooked! Fall down, trees - crooked and crooked!"

After felling a number of trees, he hauled them to the vixen. She took one look at them, and they were so knotty and twisted and crooked they wouldn't do even for a mouldboard, let alone sledge runners! Again she raged at the wolf:

"How did you chop them down?" she yelled.

"They just fell that way!"

"But why didn't you say the words I told you to?"

"I did. I said 'Fall down, trees - crooked and crooked!"

"What a stupid fool you are and a good-for-nothing at that. Wait here and look after the bully-calf while I go and fell the trees myself!"

As the wolf sat there he grew very hungry. He rummaged in the sledge, but couldn't find anything to eat. He wondered how to satisfy his hunger and could not think of anything better than to eat the bully-calf. So he fell upon him, tore a hole in his side, and ate out all the meat leaving the bones and the hide into which he chased a flock of sparrows. Then he stopped up the hole with straw, leaned the bully-calf against a hedge propping him up with a stick, and made himself scarce. When the vixen returned, she saw a wisp of straw sticking out of the bully-calf's side. She pulled out the wisp, and that instant - frrr! - the flock of sparrows flew out of the hole. When she took hold of the stick, whop! - the bully-calf fell down.

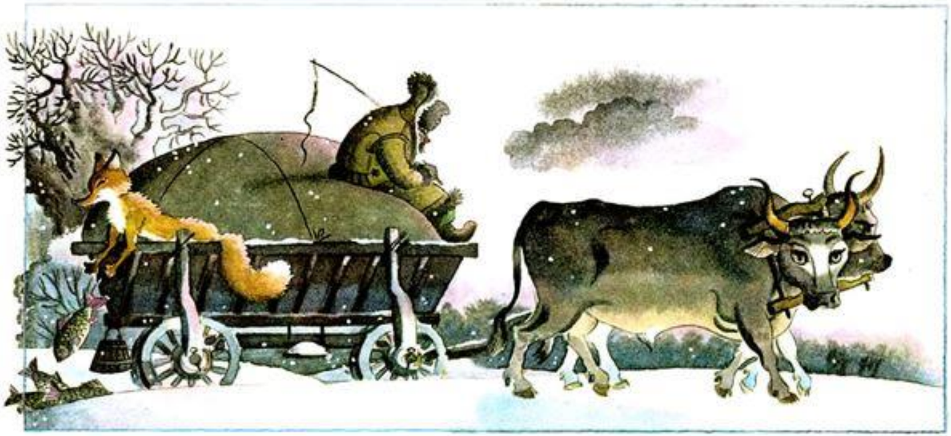
"Just you wait, you vile cheat!" she raged. "I'll get even with you yet!"

And she ran away, mad.

Running along the road, she came upon a caravan of chumak carters with wagonloads of fish. The vixen lay down in the middle of the road, pretending she was dead.

"Hey, boys, look what a wonderful fox!" one of the carters shouted.

They crowded around her, turning her this way and that. In the end they decided to take her along, since her fur would make wonderful caps for the children. They threw her on the last wagon and drove on.



Noticing that no one was paying any attention to her, the vixen started throwing fish out of the wagon. When she had thrown out quite a few onto the road, she quietly jumped from the wagon and slipped away. The carters drove on, while the vixen picked up all the fish lying on the road.

No sooner had she sat down and made herself comfortable, intending to have a good feast, than Palsy-Wolfie came running along.

"Hullo, Foxy-Loxy!"

"Hullo!"

"What are you doing, Foxy-Loxy?"

"Eating fish, of course."

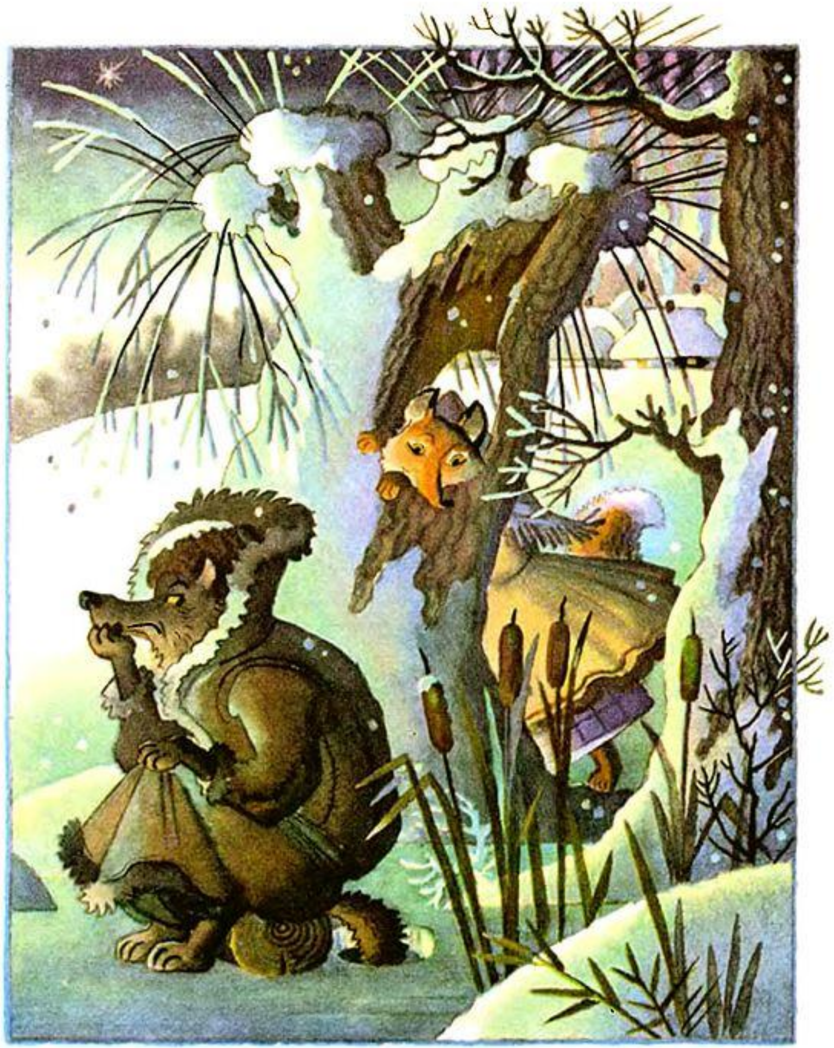
"Won't you give me some too?"

"What trouble it was catching them, and you want me to give you the fish just like that? Nothing doing! Go catch them yourself!"

"How can I? I don't even know how to catch fish. You might at least teach me how to do it!"

"Oh, there's nothing hard about it. All you have to do is go to an ice-hole, stick your tail into it, and sit there quietly, repeating all the while 'Get the bait, fish - big and small!' And you'll have them!"

"Thanks for the advice!"



The wolf ran quickly to the river, sat down by an ice-hole, stuck his tail into it, and said over and over again:

"Get the bait, fish - big and big only! Get the bait, fish - big and big only! Get the bait, fish - big and big only!"

You see, he was so greedy he wanted only the big ones. That day the weather was bitter cold. And that suited the vixen's scheme wonderfully.

"Freeze, wolf tail, freeze! Freeze, wolf tail, freeze!" she repeated all the while, running up and down the river bank to keep herself warm.

"What are you saying, Foxy-Loxy?" the wolf asked.

"I'm just saying 'Get the bait, fish - big and small!"

"Now let me try: Get the bait, fish - big and big only!"

The wolf wriggled his tail and he felt it had become heavy.

"You just wait a little more," said the vixen. "The fish have only started to hang on to your tail."

Then after a while she said:

"Now pull them out, Palsy-Wolfie!"

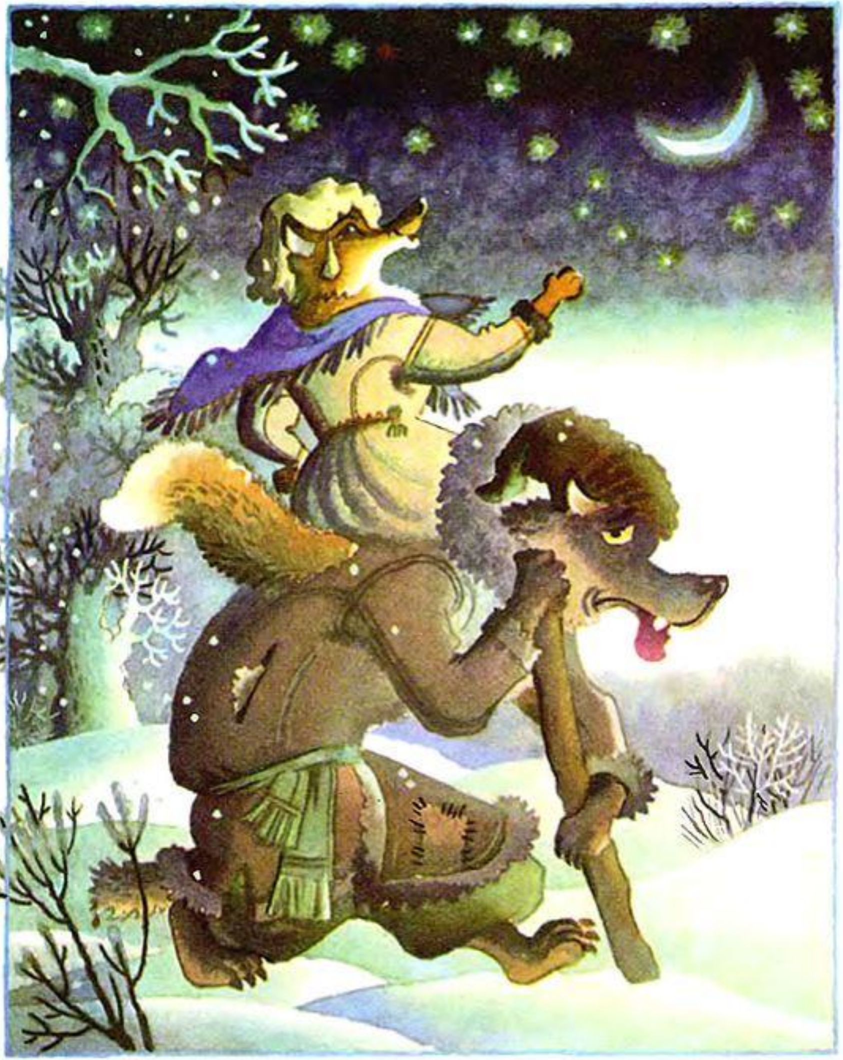
The wolf gave a pull, but his tail had frozen fast in the ice-hole and he could not pull it out.

"Oh, you wretched beast, what have you done!" the vixen yelled at him. "You said all the time 'Get the bait, fish - big and big only' and the big ones have hung on to your tail and now you can't pull it out. You know what, I'll go call someone to help you."

And off she ran toward the village.

"The wolfs in the village, the wolf's in the village, come out everyone and give him a drubbing!" she shouted, running down the village street.

Instantly the village was astir. The people came running out of their houses, some carrying axes, others pitchforks and flails, and the womenfolk were with oven forks and pokers. They made for the river and fell upon the wolf and gave him such a thrashing that his bones rattled.



In the meanwhile the vixen had sneaked into one of the houses. There was nobody home - the mistress of the house had run down to the river to flog the wolf and had left behind a vat of unkneaded dough. The vixen took some of the dough, dabbed her head with it, and ran out into the field. Presently the wolf came crawling along, more dead than alive - the poor thing was beaten black and blue. On seeing him, the vixen started to moan and to wail, pretending she was sick.

"Ah, it's you, you wily creature," said the wolf. "Just look what you've done to me. Because of you I've lost my tail."

"Oh, Palsy-Wolfie, how can you be so unfair," she said. "Don't you see that I've suffered more than you did? They cracked my skull and the brains are oozing out of my head. Palsy-Wolfie, take me on your back, for I can hardly walk!"

"But I can hardly stand on my feet myself!"

"You've lost only half of your tail, but my skull has been cracked. Oh, poor me, how will I ever get home!"

"All right, get on my back. Guess I have no choice!"

The vixen got onto his back, made herself comfortable, and kept on moaning and whining.

While the silly wolf carried his burden as best he could, the vixen kept saying to herself:

"The loser's carrying the winner! The loser's carrying the winner!"

"What's that you're saying, Foxy-Loxy?"

"Oh, I'm just saying that the loser is carrying a loser too."

After which she again mumbled to herself:

"The loser's carrying the winner!"

At long last they arrived at the vixen's den.

"Now get off my back, Foxy-Loxy, here's your home!"

She jumped down from his back, and shouted right to his face:

"The loser brought the winner home! The loser brought the winner home!"

Did the wolf get mad at her! He was about to pounce upon the vixen and tear her to pieces, when she scampered into her den. Hard as he tried the wolf could not get in. From time to time the vixen would stick her muzzle out of the den and tease the wolf:

"The loser brought the winner home!"

The wolf tried to get her out, but he could not.

"Pooh, the wretched beast!" he raged. "What a fool she made of me!"

For some time yet he raved by her den and then went his way.

As for the vixen, she lives happily to this very day, and woe to the hen that goes astray, for the vixen is cunning, the vixen is sly, and she gobbles her prey in the wink of an eye.